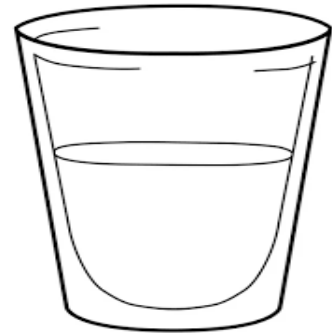


A Cup of Water: Finding God's Plan



Genesis 24
Matthew 10:40-42
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Hudson United Methodist Church
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“Whoever gives even a cup of water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Jesus, Matthew 10:42

Four or five years into our marriage John and I both wanted to go to graduate school. It was a blessing when we learned John’s employer would pay his tuition. Then we had two young sons, and I was a stay-at-home mom by choice. His first class was an evening marketing course. One evening John came home from class with a tale he knew his wife, an active Methodist church lady, would want to hear.

Their guest speaker was from a major cola company, Coke or Pepsi, and his opening question to the class was “Who do you think is our biggest competitor?” Everyone chose the other company. “No,” he said, “our biggest competitor is municipal drinking water. Regulation makes it safe; it is much cheaper than our product and it satisfies thirst better than any soda.”

Today both of our scriptures are about drinking water. The Bible is set in an arid part of the world with few springs, so fresh drinking water was best drawn from wells. When Jesus instructed us to give each other a cup of water, he was talking about well water. In Genesis, when Eliezer, Abraham’s servant (see Genesis 15:2), sought to find God’s will about a wife for Abraham’s son, Isaac, he went to a well in the evening (Genesis 24:11) and asked a young woman to draw water for him. When Rebecca drew him water, she offered to water his camels as well.

A first-time reader would know nothing about Rebecca when she first arrived in the Bible at Genesis 24:15. She is introduced to all readers as Abraham’s brother’s granddaughter. Something about her dress must have signaled to Eliezer that she was

not yet married. He asked her to draw him a drink of water, nothing more. She offered to water his camels as well.

Eliezer had asked God to lead him to Isaac's bride by just such a sign. He prayed, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. (When I ask the right young woman for water, let her say to me) 'Drink, and I will water your camels.'" (Genesis 24:13, 14, New Revised Standard Version/NRSV)

Rebecca had no idea God was showing Eliezer that she was the answer to his prayer. She was only doing her duty the way her family expected her to do it. Abraham's instructions to Eliezer was to find a "proper wife"ⁱⁱ for Isaac. Genesis scholar Walter Brueggemann asks and answers a great question for us about their first meeting. "Does God in fact lead and guide in such a way . . .? The principal characters accept a reading of reality related to Yahweh. They interpret events accordingly . . . as a true reflection of faith."ⁱⁱⁱ Eliezer and Rebecca are a great model of active faith for us to mimic as we seek to follow Christ.

Jesus taught us the Christian expectation for proper behavior is to "give a cup of water" in his name. All of us can give a cup of water to anyone. A cup of water is our minimal expectation of Christian hospitality. But the sign Eliezer requested, that Isaac's future wife offer to water the camels as well, is that she would go the extra mile of caring for a stranger. Caring for a stranger is a hallmark of our redemption. It is to do exactly what Rebecca did for Eliezer that Christ expects us to do for others as well, strangers, neighbors, friends, foes, and family alike. We know God's plan for how to treat each other because we learn it not only from Jesus' words but also from other Christians' actions, much the same way Rachel learned how to treat Eliezer from the way her parents had behaved. The first way we know God's plan is that we were taught God's plan.

The Genesis writer was inspired to describe to us a way to know God's will through prayer. Eliezer deeply desired to do his best for Abraham as he went to seek Isaac's wife. His was a joyful challenge. So Eliezer asked God for a specific sign. He did not ask for a miracle, just a sign. Based on how Abraham would expect the right bride to behave, Eliezer asked God that the right young woman would offer water for his camels on her own. When Rebecca came to the well, Eliezer asked only for a drink of water only for himself. Rebecca chose to offer water for the camels, extra work on her part, without anyone telling her aloud to do that. Only after she responded to Eliezer's well-mannered question by offering to do more for him did he check her family credentials to be certain he had found the right woman.

This account of finding Isaac's wife has two interesting silences. Isaac is silent, and God never says a word. God certainly communicates, but God never speaks. Both Abraham and Eliezer trusted God's promise to make a great nation of Isaac's descendants. After all they have been through raising this young man, now that Abraham was a widower the two decided to trust God by doing what God expects the faithful to do, and by asking for a sign—not a miracle, just a sign—that could not be manipulated, a sign that would reveal a young woman's character.

If you are looking for a solution to a problem in your life, try praying the same way Eliezer prayed. His was an open prayer, one where he could not pre-determine the outcome. He told God clearly the response he needed to see to know if the young woman he asked for a drink of water was the right woman to be Isaac's wife. God answered Eliezer's prayer through Rebecca's actions.

God still speaks that way. I used this approach all the way through graduate school, asking that if my call to pastoral ministry was God's will that God make a way for my studies with no student debt. I prayed that if I was to go forward, God would show his approval by taking care of our costs. Funding came many ways, but John's salary always supported our household, not my tuition.

What God desires, God will provide the means to achieve.

Now as your pastor, volunteering and serving on boards of charities is part of my job. I have discovered how important it is to challenge my listeners with actions that will grow your faith. This month, could you give up a soda or some other beverage a day in favor of tap water this July? Could you be willing to share the money you will save in our Mission of the Month offering so together our church can support a community with greater needs than our own, the Northcott Neighborhood House in Milwaukee?

This is not an original idea, I learned it from my pastor, Rev. Verda Aegerter. The same year John learned about saving municipal water is a marketing problem. Our Pastor Verda came to speak at our church's Mother's Club the week before Ash Wednesday. As stay-at-home moms by choice, we all managed our family food budgets. She challenged us to give up soda for Lent to make a group contribution to a local charity. We all agreed to try.

Then, Diet Coke was marketed "just for the taste of it" and I hummed their jingle every afternoon as I drank one while our sons napped. My personal rule for buying soda was to never pay more than \$0.02 per ounce (\$0.25 for a can, \$1.28 for a 2-liter bottle). By giving up Diet Coke for Lent, I saved \$10 for our fund. Together we

raised about \$400 for our Lenten charity. I learned two life lessons. First, I learned what a group practicing stewardship together can achieve for others in need. Second, I learned Diet Coke aggravated my chronic headaches. To this day I do not drink diet sodas.

In our current economy, charitable giving is down while the need for charitable services is up. Can you please join me in giving up a daily beverage to save money to support our Mission of the Month (MOM), Northcott Neighborhood House? My current afternoon can of flavored fizzy water costs \$0.40 per can/\$0.03 per ounce. If I drank tap water or sun brewed iced tea instead, I could save \$11.20 to share by July 30th. Our church budget commitment to every MOM is \$600, and when the Tin Can offering less than \$600, we use General Fund money to meet our mission commitment. My \$11.20 saved by drinking tap water is a drop in our church budget, but when I give 11.20 to MOM \$11.20 is left in the General Fund to pay our fixed expenses, such paper used to print sermons for our 36 homebound families. We would truly be drinking water in Jesus name with this challenge! Will you join me?

Amen.

ⁱ The servant is speaking in our reading for today, and unnamed in the chapter. When I researched a possible name, all my sources agreed on "Eliezer," the servant who was Abraham's heir before either Ishmael or Isaac were born. Genesis 15:2.

ⁱⁱ P. 197, Walter Bruggeman, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for teaching and Preaching*: Genesis, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1982.

ⁱⁱⁱ P. 201, Brueggemann.